

VOUCHERS REWARD DRUG ABSTINENCE

Pregnant heroin addicts in Toronto can receive methadone treatment and vouchers redeemable for goods and services by participating in a new outpatient treatment program sponsored by the Addiction Research Foundation (ARF). Organizers hope the Pregnant and Clean Project will reduce drug and alcohol use during pregnancy and teach participants how to lead a drug-free life. Methadone treatment will be provided during pregnancy, with participants having the option of continuing the treatment after giving birth.

In exchange for abstinence from illicit drugs and alcohol, expectant mothers will earn vouchers that can be redeemed for items such as baby furniture, maternity wear and restaurant passes. No client receives money, and vouchers are not redeemable for alcohol or cigarettes. Participants also receive behavioural treatment and physician support for 6 months. In a news release, the ARF said similar treatment programs for adults dependent on cocaine and heroin have been very successful.

AND YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

Physicians who are fretting about their finances in these precarious economic times should spare a moment for Dr. Kichinosuke Sasaki, a Tokyo physician who, on paper at least, is the poorest man on earth.

His current net worth is minus \$2.4 billion (US), give or take a few million. Sasaki, who specialized in brain diseases, caught the real-estate bug after building a clinic with a loan from a patient and went on to fame and fortune in the 1980s, the golden age of Japanese real estate.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Sasaki had a net worth of about \$4.7 billion 5 years ago. Then Tokyo property values crashed, leaving him with 90 properties valued at \$1 billion and a debt of \$3.4 billion. The good news for Sasaki is that he is so far in debt his banks can't pull the financial plug. "I'm too big to fail," he says. Japanese banks already have \$367 billion in nonperforming loans, most related to real estate.

PSYCHIATRISTS CAN ORDER COMPULSORY TREATMENT IN COMMUNITY

Changes to Saskatchewan's Mental Health Services Act now allow a psychiatrist to order compulsory treatment in the community. It is the first legislation of its kind in Canada. The changes are designed for cases in which legal authority is required to give treatment without a person's consent, but where the person does not need to be detained in hospital. About 75 Saskatchewan residents, most with long-term disorders such as schizophrenia or bipolar affective disorder, are expected to be affected.

If two psychiatrists examine the person and write a certificate in support of a community-treatment or-

der, the patient is obliged to submit to the prescribed medical treatment and attend appointments as scheduled with the attending psychiatrist and case manager. If a patient fails to comply, a compulsory re-examination can be ordered or other measures taken. A notification to physicians from Saskatchewan Health says the new measure will give family members and caregivers more support to help patients, and reduce the use of psychiatric beds in hospitals.

PQ PROCEEDS WITH AXING OF HOSPITALS

Despite demonstrations, lobbying and months of counterproposals by hospital staff, officials and the public, the Parti Québécois government plans to go ahead with the closure of nine Montreal-area hospitals. One is the Queen Elizabeth, whose rumoured demise prompted a *CMAJ* Viewpoint article (153: 457-458) by Dr. Jack Rothstein.

The *McGill Reporter* says the Queen Elizabeth offered a unique environment for medical residents by allowing them to gain experience in more types of medicine than at any other McGill teaching hospital; the training was considered particularly valuable for those aiming to practise rural medicine. Since family-medicine residents will no longer be able to complete their program at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, the 14 residents returning in 1996 will be relocated to four other hospitals in the McGill network.

PHOTOS, VIDEOS CAN VIOLATE PATIENT RIGHTS

Health care providers who videotape or photograph surgical procedures, births or other medical operations may be violating patients' privacy rights, warns the American Health Information Management Association (AMIHA). In a news release that advised patients to read and sign a consent form that gives approval to photograph medical procedures, the AMIHA said: "If photography is necessary for your medical care, be proactive about security."

Patients should ask about the health care provider's written policy on photography, ask how visual records are stored, ensure any written consent form sets parameters on how visual records will be used, get copies of the consent form and ask about intended use of the photograph.

CANADA HAS FEWER TIPPLERS

The number of people drinking alcohol in Canada has declined by 5.4%, according to the 1994 *Canada's Alcohol and Other Drugs Survey*, which was released in November by Health Canada. The survey of 12 155 Canadians took place in fall 1994. The survey shows that 16.7 million Canadians aged 15 and over (72.3%) reported drinking in the previous year, down from 77.7% in the previous survey; 79.2% felt their own consumption of alcohol had not harmed them, while 10.5% reported at least one harmful effect. Another 20.3% admitted to drinking and driving.

Close to 21% of Canadians reported using prescription pain pills, sleeping pills, tranquilizers, antidepressant drugs and diet pills, with more females (23.9%) than males (17.7%) reporting medication use. The most popular illegal drug was cannabis; 7.4% of respondents said

they had used it in the previous year (the lifetime use is 23.1%). The percentage of people using specific illegal drugs had risen 0.7% since the previous survey was undertaken in 1989; cocaine or crack use was reported by 3.8% of respondents, while use of LSD, speed and/or heroin was reported by 1.1%.

BCMA CREDITED AS PROVINCE PASSES NEW BIKE-HELMET LAW

The British Columbia Medical Association (BCMA) is receiving much of the credit for provincial legislation, effective next September, which will require cyclists to wear helmets. The BCMA Sports Medicine Committee, chaired by Dr. Bill Mackie, began its fight for the legislation in 1987.

The *BCMA News* attributed some of the success to an extensive public-awareness campaign that featured a "Protect Your Melon" poster. It showed a crushed watermelon, which provided a graphic example of what can happen to an unhelmeted head. The committee lobbied government and took every media opportunity it was offered to get its message across.

ASA PRICES COULD GIVE TRAVELLERS A HEADACHE

Heading overseas? You might find it considerably cheaper to take your own nonprescription medication than to buy it at your destination. A survey in the Oct. 23 edition of *Medical Economics* compared the cost of 100 acetylsalicylic acid (ASA) tablets in nine major cities, and the cost ranged from \$1.78 in Mexico City to a whopping \$36.57 in Tokyo (all

prices are in US funds). Paying for the tablets also might give you a headache in Rome (\$17.73), Hong Kong (\$11.58) and Madrid (\$10.77). Toronto, at \$5.04, was the second-cheapest city.

AIDS DEATH TOLL EXCEEDS 8600

Data in the *Quarterly Surveillance Update* published by the Laboratory Centre for Disease Control indicate that by October 1995 12 119 cases of AIDS had been reported in Canada, including 116 pediatric cases involving children younger than 15; there have been 8614 deaths. Health Canada has announced that a reorganization involving the division of HIV/AIDS Epidemiology has led to the creation of a new Bureau of HIV/AIDS and STD (sexually transmitted diseases). The director is Dr. Don Sutherland.

LAWYERS SPELL OUT TIPS ON CONFIDENTIALITY

Client confidentiality in the electronic age is a concern for lawyers as well as physicians. The Law Society of Upper Canada recently published a warning in *The Adviser* (June 1995) that suggested a review of office procedures and equipment in order to establish and maintain adequate security. "Securing client information may be time consuming, but it can save a costly negligence action," the article said.

Suggestions involving computer security included the use of passwords for both notebook and network computers and use of password-protect screen savers for computers located in public areas. Lawyers were also advised to assume that all modem and Internet communication can be accessed by prying eyes.